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DANC 461: Senior Thesis Project

Yoga Certification

Amanda Matthews

In partial fulfillment of

The Bachelor of Arts Degree in Dance

Loyola Marymount University

May 2, 2016

Section 1: A Yogi in the Making

I was first introduced to yoga as a young sixteen year old in a local yoga studio at my hometown of Auburn, California. I remember being so nervous to take a yoga class because I had no prior knowledge of the postures, philosophy, or purpose of yoga. The class was a hot yoga flow sequence and I was one of the youngest students in the room. The instructor was an experienced yogi and to my surprise created a supportive and comforting environment the moment I walked into the room. He took the time to explain the theme of the class and what our bodies would be doing physically. After I realized that yoga was about yourself and only yourself, my mind stopped spinning and began to release the anxiety I had in me. I remember feeling so calm, relieved, and blissful after taking the class and soon this feeling became addicting to me.

As a junior in high school I was balancing many activities and responsibilities. I danced for over twenty hours a week, volunteered on a weekly basis, maintained a good grade point average, held leadership positions at school such as dance captain and class president, and had an instructor position at my dance studio. Before even coming to college, I had a jam-packed schedule and little time for myself. Although I was involved, had good grades, and enjoyed my friends, I soon became depressed and questioned who I was as a person. I had a difficult time spending time alone because I was rarely alone. I did not know what it was like to take a break, have dinner with my family, or relax on the couch. When my best friend, Kendall realized that my busy life was becoming too overwhelming, she suggested that I tried yoga with her. Kendall was new to yoga but had an instant connection to it. She felt that it was a good practice for someone to relax their mind while

doing something beneficial for your body. Later that week I discovered that Kendall was right.

When it came time to choose a senior thesis project I knew that I wanted to spend more time learning, practicing, and engaging with yoga. I was inspired to pursue a two hundred hour teacher-training program after I heard about LMU senior, Lindsey Brigg's experience. I looked up to Lindsey because of her positive personality and work ethic in dance classes. Lindsey and I would talk before and after ballet about our common interests and experiences at LMU. When she told me about her senior thesis and that she was creating yoga sequences for children I got inspired. Before making the decision of pursuing teacher training as my thesis I asked Lindsey for her advice and insight. She encouraged me that teacher training was one of the best experiences of her life and that CorePower yoga had a well-respected program.

Lindsey got me in contact with her studio manager at CorePower, Sofia where I was able to meet up with for coffee. When I met with Sofia it was as if we had been friends for years. She was welcoming, warm, and honest with the questions I asked her about teacher training. After meeting with Sofia in February, I started working at CorePower Yoga as a cleaner in exchange for a membership. During this time I started to take more yoga classes and get more involved with the studio. I looked forward going to the studio to clean once a week because the environment reminded me of my small town studio at home. All of the instructors took the time to get to know me, and I was already becoming friends with the students. Before summer began, I signed up for teacher training and made a two-month commitment to yoga. Signing up for teacher training was my first real investment, because I was paying for it on my own. This made the experience even more rewarding in the end.

People sign up for teacher training for different reasons; they either want to learn more about their practice or specifically to become a teacher and to have a career out of teaching. Before teacher training started, my intention was to learn more about yoga, my practice, and myself. Becoming a teacher was a plus, but I truly wanted to learn about the mental and physical benefits of yoga. As a dance major at LMU, I had the opportunity to experience many different mind body connection methods and practices. In my training, I was looking forward to learning more about yoga and how it is either similar or different to other practices that I had previously learned about. I wanted to learn how to apply my yoga knowledge and practice to my dancing. I asked myself, could yoga have a positive effect on dancing? If so, I wanted to learn what and how it did.

Before starting teacher training there were some challenges that I had to overcome. First, I had to brainstorm how I was going to be able to afford the training. After talking to Sofia I learned that if I cleaned the studio for three hours a week, I would earn a membership and thirty percent off of teacher training. Therefore, I started cleaning the studio three months before training began. I also started to save more money from working on campus and was able to afford the teacher training come June 2015. Paying for the training on my own was important to me and challenged me to learn more about budgeting. Another challenge was finding the appropriate time to take the teacher training. Throughout the training, students are required to take sixty yoga classes and attend all training sessions that were for three hours three times a week. Because I am a double major and have a part time job, I knew that I could not do teacher training during the semester. Luckily, there was a training opportunity over summer.

Section 2: Process of Yogi to Instructor

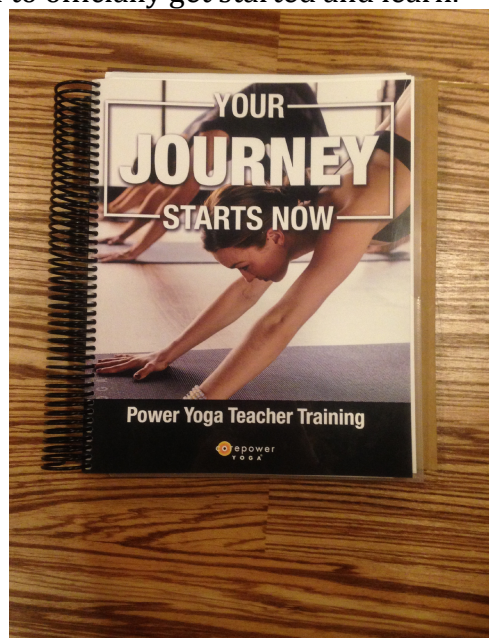
Teacher Training began on June 16, 2015 and would be eight weeks long. On the first training session I learned that I had sixteen yogis in my training and four coaches. To my surprise, I was the second youngest in my teacher training class. Most of my classmates were between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-five, two were in their first and second trimester of their pregnancy, and one was a mom of four kids. We had a diverse group of trainees and all had a different reason for wanting to do teacher training. I remember looking around the room at my sixteen fellow yogis and wondering who I was going to get close to in the next eight weeks. It was unbeknownst to me that I would end up with sixteen amazing friends in August. My lead coach was Sofia who was the manager and the other coaches were Shane, Sarah, and Christine. All four taught yoga at CorePower and participated in teacher training at CorePower. These four would be my mentors, advisors, and rocks for the duration of the training. They were able to create a positive learning environment where all questions were accepted. Sometimes in a college classroom, I feel insecure about my question or getting the answer wrong in front of the entire class. However, teacher training was an incredible, supportive environment that listened to different perspectives and took the time to answer questions thoroughly. This inspired me to create this kind of environment for my yoga and dance classes in the future.

On June 16, 2015 I wrote my first journal entry for my yoga teacher training experience. As part of our homework, we had to journal all sixty yoga classes that we took and all of the teacher training sessions. Through my classes at LMU, I learned that keeping a journal was very difficult for me and I was determined to end that bad habit during teacher training. I kept my journal with me everywhere I went and would always dedicate five

minutes before or after class to complete a journal entry. In the end, I felt accomplished that I overcame something that was so difficult for me. My first entry captures my excitement and appreciation for the opportunity to learn and grow through my yoga practice.

June 16, 2015

I was so excited for the first session of teacher training tonight! I have been waiting for this day for so long! I loved how we started class in a tight circle and breathed together and passed the oil drops to each other. We felt like a unit and I could feel the energy in the room. I am excited to get to know everyone and learn from them. All of the coaches are very friendly and welcoming with beautiful practices. Overall, I think that this will be a great learning environment for me, free of judgment and competition. I loved learning about the ten essentials of yoga and getting a sneak peak of what teacher training will be like. I can't wait to delve into my journey of teacher training and to officially get started and learn.



CorePower Yoga Teacher Training Manual 2015

After the initial teacher session we began to learn about the postures and engage in what the instructors called “posture clinics”. Posture clinics were when we analyzed the postures in order of the sequence and practiced cueing someone into the posture. Posture clinics were very hard to get used to because I felt that we got thrown into cueing someone

without practicing how to create a cue. There are four main formulas that a teacher has to follow when creating a cue. First, is the basic formula: breath, posture, and three cues that describe the posture. Second, is the cue formula: verb, your, body part, direction. Next is coordinating which of the three cues should go first. The formula is, feet/legs, pelvis/spine, and arms/head. Therefore, you have to organize your three cues from the ground up. The fourth formula is the breath formula: engage, disengage, and re-engage. At first, this all seemed very complicated to me; however, after I started taking more classes I realized the purpose for organizing the cues in this fashion. I explain my realization in Shane's class on June 18, 2015.

June 18, 2015

Shane's class today was both challenging and fun! He was very friendly as everyone walked into the studio and took the time to engage and talk with his students. The class began in child's pose, which is a great posture to begin class with. It helps to create length in the back and for the body to ground down and connect with the breath. Shane led the class through ujjayi breath well and his description was easy to understand and follow. Now that I have taken C2 for a while I know the skeleton of Shane's sequence. This is nice because now I can focus on more deepening cues than the general cues for the sequence and postures. Shane gives great deepening cues that show his knowledge of the body and muscles. Shane connected well with his students and made sure to ask everyone how they were feeling after class.

Knowing the proper breath cue was the most challenging in the training experience because it was hard to identify which posture was an inhale or exhale breath. This is when I used my prior dance and Pilates experience to help create a context for the postures. I figured out that if the posture is moving up or extending it is inhale, if the posture involves a downward movement like extended side angle, it was exhale. For some postures that were hard to identify, I had to memorize the breath cue. I learned that practicing was the key to teaching yoga. My friends and I would get to training sessions early so we could

practice developing cues and ask each other questions. I benefited the most by learning from others and mine mistakes.

Another challenge that I faced during teacher training was the physical challenge of completing sixty yoga classes. There were days where I would take three hot yoga classes in a row. I am thankful for my experience of being a dancer because that training definitely prepared me for the strength and stamina it took to take three yoga classes in a row. Although there were days where I didn't want to take yoga and wanted to rest, I was disciplined enough to take an average of one yoga class a day for eight weeks. This discipline was a result of my years of ballet and dance training. I was determined to finish all sixty by the end of teacher training in August.

Some of the postures that we were learning also came to a challenge for me. I remember the day when I finally nailed crow pose. Crow is an arm balance and inversion where you balance your legs on the back of your arms on your triceps. I was nervous when it came time to learn crow pose because I knew that I could not do it yet. However, we discussed as a group that it is acceptable to teach poses that you couldn't perform yet. Yoga is a personal practice and everyone is at different levels and steps with their practice. We learned that as teachers, it is important to recognize that. When I finally accomplished crow pose I was overwhelmed with excitement. It was rewarding to see how my body was getting stronger through my daily activity of yoga.



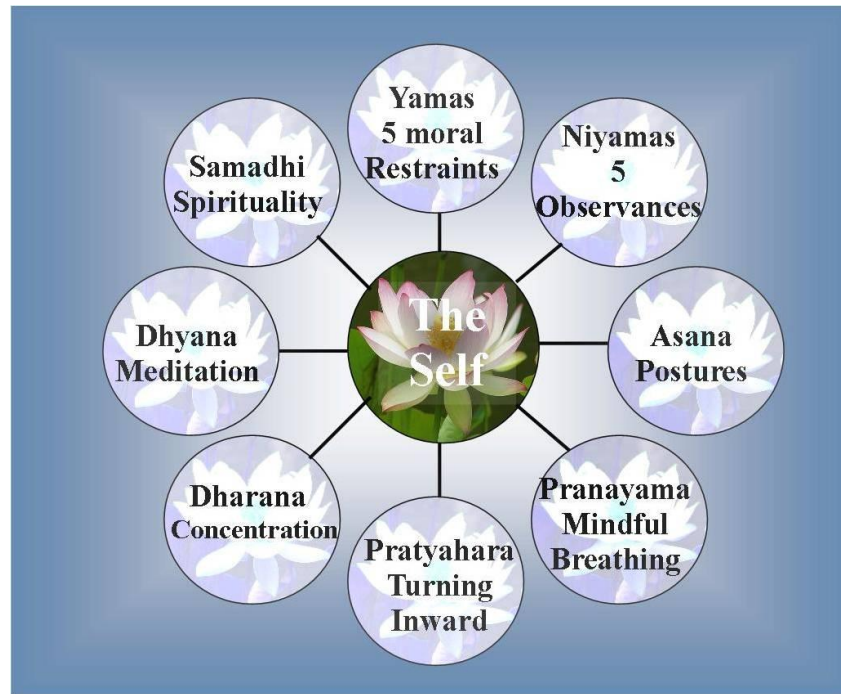
Picture of the first time getting crow pose at CorePower Yoga.

During the training we also learned about yoga philosophy, history, and anatomy. I was particularly interested in learning about the philosophy and yoga and how to teach yoga philosophy to students. We had our yoga philosophy and history unit on July 7, 2015. We learned about the creation of yoga how it came to what we know of it today. The first references to yoga are found during the Vedic Period in India at around 2000-1000 B.C.E. At this time, people were experimenting with breath control and basic spirituality. In 1000 B.C.E. the term yoga is first encountered and used by the Upanishads. During the Epic Period in 500 B.C.E. the Mahabharata, Bhagavad Gita, and Upanishads are orally composed. Yoga was its own distinct philosophy and practice was slowly beginning to take shape. The father of yoga, Patanjali wrote the Yoga Sutras in the year 200 where the eight limbed path and basic postures are first introduced. Hatha yoga began to take shape in the post-classical era during the years of 500-1900. At around 1900, various yoga masters came to the United States and other western countries to start teaching yoga to a new audience.

Our discussion during our lecture was primarily about the Yoga Sutras and Patanjali's Eight Limbed Yogic path. The Yoga Sutras were written by Patanjali, which defined the yogic path, established yoga principles, and provided an explanation for the objective of yoga. He gave a purpose for asana and described the benefits of a yoga practice. The eight-limbed yoga path is a step-by-step path toward the realization of yoga, or union, with the universal self. The eight limbs progress from the most external practices, to the most internal practices. During our training, we learned about the eight limbed path and how to relate it to our students and to the current times. The path includes: Yamas, Niyamas, Asana, Pranyama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana, and Samadhi. Out of the eight limbs, the yamas and niyamas spoke the most to me. The yamas are a list of how you should behave outwardly towards other beings. This includes: non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, sensual moderation, and non-hoarding. The niyamas are a list of how you conduct yourself on a personal level: cleanliness, contentment, discipline, self-study, and devotion. To me, these two lists reminded me of the Ten Commandments in Christianity and enabled me to connect with my own Catholic religion. I reflected on the yoga philosophy lecture in my journal.

July 7, 2015

I was so excited to learn about Yoga history and philosophy tonight. I have been waiting for this lecture and was anticipating it the most. Jess led the lecture and was absolutely amazing. She spoke with such clarity and really wanted us to comprehend and understand what she was saying. I really had little knowledge about yoga philosophy so this was all fairly new to me. These are hard, abstract concepts so I really had to have an open mind. I loved learning about the yamas and niyamas and noticed their similarity to the Ten Commandments of Christianity. I liked this because I feel that I can apply my yoga practice to my own spiritual beliefs and higher God. We also discussed the meaning of OM and all participated in a thirteen minute OM session. This was such a remarkable experience for me and I really felt in true meditation for the first time.



Patanjali's Eight Limbed Yogic Path

The two hundred hour training also included a six-hour lecture on anatomy and the physical benefits of yoga. CorePower Area Leader, Charlotte Munn who has been the leader of the anatomy lecture for over five years, led the lecture. The lecture was held at the Hollywood location and all of the teacher trainers who were participating in training over the summer attended. Charlotte has a background in theater and was able to make the anatomy lecture both entertaining and insightful. The first three hours were about the physical make up of humans. We reviewed the bones and muscles of the body and how they move and work together. The information that we received was review for me because of my Kinesiology for Dancers class.

The second day we applied the human's anatomy to yoga and the postures. We discussed the physical benefits of yoga, the importance of anatomy for yoga, importance of

alignment, and the efficiency of movement. I also learned that yoga involves heat because it allows the connective tissue to loosen up. Heat enhances the tissue's ability to soften and relax, which is beneficial for stretching. Yoga is also cautious about joint alignment. As teachers, our cues encompass correct body alignment and we are encouraged to help our students with injury prevention. This teaches efficiency in yoga and effortlessness of movement. We reviewed the benefits of each posture and began to understand the importance of the order of the sequence. For example, the first couple postures help create internal focus, introduce and define breath, and warm up the spine with flexion and extension. I thought the anatomy lectures were very informative especially for teacher trainers who have less experience with anatomy.

We also learned how to provide adjustments and assists to students in order to correct safe joint placement. Poses look different on every body and we learned how to identify when someone's joint is not properly stacked or if their hips were not level. There are four different types of assists: verbal, directional, physical, and demonstration. It is just as important to protect yourself when you are providing adjustments than it is for the yogi. We learned that being present and confident are vital for doing assists because it shows the student that you are fully engaged. We want the student to trust us when we are helping them with a posture. It is also crucial that you breathe with the student. At first, it was challenging for me to identify a student's breath if they breathe softly. I was nervous that I would cue the assist at the wrong point of their breath. It was also difficult for me to find the appropriate time to interrupt someone's practice. Yoga is a personal practice and at times I felt I was interrupting their personal time. I was able to overcome these challenges by practicing and discussing it with my friends and coaches.

July 21, 2015

The adjustments and assists lecture was super fun! I felt that I really digested what I learned because we practiced making assists right away. It was helpful that the manual started with Integration and child's pose so we could practice the order of the postures again. Because of dance, I feel comfortable with working with other bodies and making adjustments. However, I need to learn how to correctly apply pressure by using my body weight and straight elbows. I also thought that it was helpful for us to practice with more than one person because everyone has different bodies. The amount of information was a bit overwhelming and I am going to have to practice and study a lot before the Round Robin and practice teaching on Saturday. I found that it was really cool how we can feel each other's energy when making assists. I'm excited to apply what I learned to my teaching!

One of the topics we also covered were modifications for prenatal women. This was one of my favorite lectures because not only did we learn how women can still practice yoga when they are pregnant, but also we taught each other a pre-natal sequence while wearing balloons for our bellies. We learned about some things that pregnant women should avoid in yoga. They cannot compress the belly, twist, or lay on their belly. Instead, we learned how women could practice different postures to avoid doing these three to their belly. At first it was difficult to teach a class with these modifications because we had only been practicing teaching for a short amount of time.



July 26, 2015: Prenatal lecture

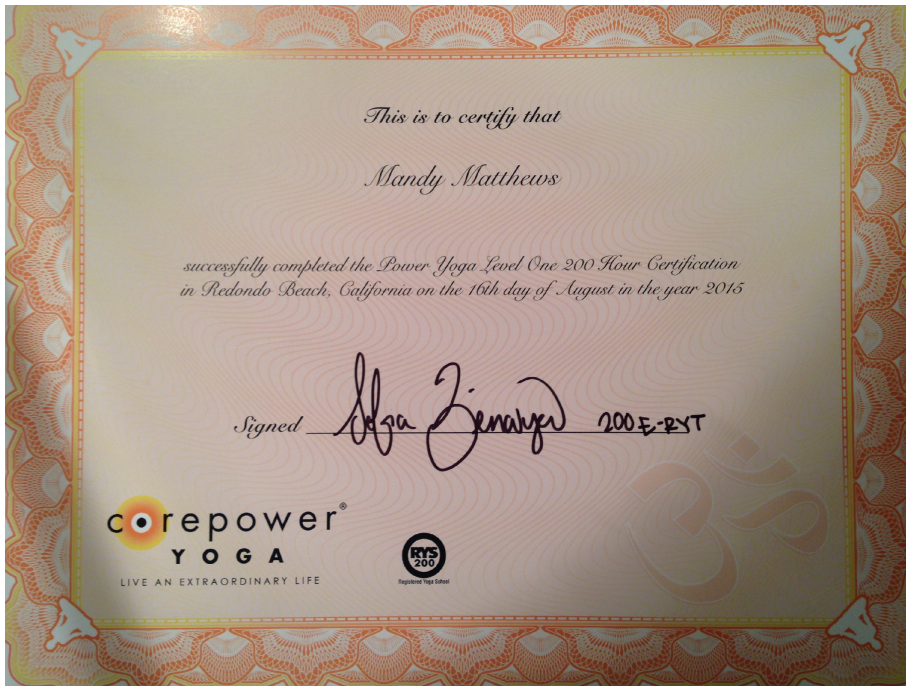
One of the most rewarding experiences of teacher training was finally being able to teach my first yoga class. During our last couple sessions of teacher training, we practiced teaching in a Round Robin style. We were given a section to teach to each other and taught a full hour class together. Although Round Robins were very nerve wracking, I believed that they were beneficial because it helped with getting comfortable teaching in front of others. It was rewarding because I felt that all of my weeks of training were finally paying off. I was able to recognize what I still needed to work on and what my strengths were while teaching. I didn't know how much I learned until I was able to test my knowledge during our Round Robin practices. Round Robin's also helped me to prepare for our final, which was teaching an entire class to our coaches and another teacher trainer.

Section 3: Reflection on my Teacher Training Experience

On August 16, 2015 I passed my final exam and completed the Power Yoga Level One 200 Hour Certification at CorePower Yoga. I was so overwhelmed and excited that I was finally a yoga teacher. When reflecting on the eight weeks and the training program, there were a few things that I felt I needed to further develop. First, I wanted to learn how to properly sequence my own class. In teacher training we learned one sequence that we teach to beginners and did not learn how to sequence our own classes for different levels. This was one of my motivations for continuing my yoga training and taking the Extensions program at CorePower. I also wanted to work on developing my personal teaching style and voice. This came after I started teaching at CorePower and learned how I like to structure my class and bring it my personality and confidence.



August 16, 2015: Graduation Day



Section 4: Present and Future

My goal after I graduate is to serve the dance community through my work in arts administrator positions at nonprofits, being a yoga teacher, and owning my own nonprofit dance studio someday. Earning a degree in dance not only challenged me physically and artistically, but also mentally through the constant discipline within technique classes and studying difficult concepts. My skills of being discipline will aid with first finding a job. In order to find a job that you want and are happy with you need to be discipline with the job search, updating resumes, and reaching out to connections for an informational interview. With my field of choice, working for an art nonprofit, there are minimal jobs available because of how specific my search is. I hope to find a new job where I can have full time

status and can advance by the end of summer. My yoga practice and dance taught me the importance of being discipline and have helped me with staying dedicated to finding the right job for me.

I have already begun teaching yoga at CorePower Yoga in Redondo Beach and Torrance. I taught my first class in December and will be beginning to teach the higher levels the week after graduation. As a new yoga teacher I strive to provide my students with the physical, mental, and spiritual benefits of yoga and teach a well-rounded class that can assist every student. This teaching philosophy was supported by my four years spent training in dance and learning about the benefits of movement and dance. I already have my regular students that come to every one of my classes. It is rewarding to be able to teach others about the benefits of yoga and to help people with their physical and mental goals. I am very thankful for the prenatal lecture because I have a prenatal student who loves to come to my class. I have been working with her to try different variations and modifications for postures that she is unable to do. One of my students made me earrings once because she knew I would appreciate them. I feel very connected to my students and teaching yoga has become part of my “me” time.

My long term career goal and dream of mine is to establish and own a nonprofit dance and yoga studio. I have always had interest in running a dance studio, however I want to establish a studio that could be accessible to people of all demographics and ages for a low cost. Not all parents are able to afford dance classes for their kids and not all college students or hard working individuals are able to afford to take yoga classes. Everyone should have the opportunity to practice what he or she loves to do and benefit from the positive effects of engaging in movement. Although this is a far stretched goal and

may or may not happen, I can support studios that do currently serve all communities and make decisions about my career that lead me in this direction. Working in a studio whose mission is to serve underprivileged neighborhoods and demographics would be a success for me.

My experiences at Loyola Marymount University has prepared me and pointed me in the right direction with where I want my future career to take me. LMU introduced me to my internship at the Arts Council that later transformed to a part time job position and hopefully a full time position. This internship experience opened my eyes to a field that I did not even knew existed. It helped me to fall back in love with my dance major and to completely invest myself in my classes in hopes that it would provide me with skills needed for my future job beyond the Arts Council. My dance degree gave me endless knowledge about the different fields in dance and ways that I can give back to my dance community. As a yoga teacher and arts administrator I hope to achieve my goal of making movement accessible to all people.